

Spectators of Life

Guy Pène du Bois and John Sloan

Selections from the Permanent Collection



Guy Pène du Bois, Opera Box, 1926.

**Whitney Museum of American Art
Downtown Branch**

at Federal Hall National Memorial
26 Wall Street (at Broad)

September 19 – October 28, 1983

Checklist

All works are from the Permanent Collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art. Dimension are in inches, height preceding width.

Guy Pène du Bois (1884-1958)

Opera, 1907

Crayon and pencil on paper, 14 7/8 x 12 3/8
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.532

A Fashion in Stripes, c. 1910

Charcoal and watercolor on cardboard, 14 1/4 x 11 1/2
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.530

"Do you think it will be cool when we get there?", 1914
Crayon and watercolor on cardboard, 13 3/8 x 11 3/8
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.528

Eugenics Again, 1914

Crayon and pencil, 13 3/8 x 11 5/8
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.529

Promenade, c. 1914

Pencil on paper, 13 1/2 x 11 5/8
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31. 539

Blonde and Brunette, 1915

Oil on wood, 20 x 15
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.178

The Law, c. 1915

Crayon on cardboard, 15 7/8 x 12 3/4
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31. 536

Juliana Force at the Whitney Studio Club, c. 1920

Oil on wood, 20 x 15
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. James S. Addams in memory of Philip K. Hutchins 51.43

Jeanne Eagels in "Rain", 1922

Oil on canvas, 84 3/4 x 48
Purchase 31.181

Morning, Paris Café, 1926

Oil on canvas, 36 1/4 x 28 3/4
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.182

Opera Box, 1926

Oil on canvas, 57 1/2 x 45 1/4
Purchase 31.184

Trouville, 1926

Ink on paper, 7 5/8 x 7 1/4
Purchase 31.542

First Night, Theatre Guild, 1928

Ink on paper, 11 3/4 x 10 7/8
Purchase 31.531

Mother and Daughter, 1928

Oil on canvas, 21 3/4 x 18
Purchase 31.183

Trio, 1928

Ink on paper, 12 x 7
Purchase 31.541

Café Monnot, c. 1928-29

Oil on canvas, 22 x 18 1/2
Gift of Rita and Daniel Fraad, Jr. 66.124

Conversation, 1929

Ink on paper, 9 1/2 x 9 3/4
Purchase 31.527

Father and Son, 1929

Oil on canvas, 21 1/2 x 18
Purchase 31.179

Girl with Cigarette, 1929

Ink on paper, 13 x 9 1/2
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.534

Woman with Cigarette, 1929

Oil on canvas, 36 1/4 x 28 3/4
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.178

Portrait Robert W. Chanler, n.d.

Oil on canvas, 20 x 15
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.185

Two Men, n.d.

Oil on wood, 20 x 15
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.186

John Sloan (1871-1951)

"New York City Life" series, 1905-11

Connoisseurs of Prints, 1905

Etching: image, 5 x 6 7/8; sheet, 9 9/16 x 12 1/2
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.813

Fifth Avenue Critics, 1905

Etching: image, 5 x 6 7/8; sheet, 10 1/6 x 12 3/8
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.814

The Show Case, 1905

Etching: image, 5 x 6 15/16; sheet, 9 3/4 x 12 1/2
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.820

Man Monkey, 1905

Etching: image, 4 15/16 x 7; sheet, 9 7/16 x 12 9/16
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.818

Fun, One Cent, 1905

Etching: image, 4 3/4 x 6 13/16; sheet, 9 5/8 x 12 3/8
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.816

The Women's Page, 1905

Etching: image, 4 9/16 x 6 9/16; sheet, 9 1/2 x 12 5/8
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.822

Turning Out the Light, 1905

Etching: image, 4 3/4 x 6 13/16; sheet, 7 15/16 x 11 1/4
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.821

Man, Wife and Child, 1905

Etching: image, 5 x 6 13/16; sheet, 9 3/8 x 12 5/8
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.819

Roofs, Summer Night, 1906

Etching: image, 5 1/4 x 6 15/16; sheet, 9 3/8 x 12 5/8
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.826

The Little Bride, 1906

Etching: image, 5 1/8 x 6 13/16; sheet, 9 5/8 x 12 3/16
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.824

Girl and Beggar, 1910

Etching: image, 4 1/4 x 5 3/4; sheet, 10 3/8 x 10 9/16
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.831

Night Windows, 1910
Etching: image, 5 1/8 x 6 13/16; sheet, 9 1/4 x 12 7/16
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.833

The Picture Buyer, 1911
Etching: image, 5 1/8 x 6 15/16; sheet, 9 1/2 x 12 1/2
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.834

Memory, 1906
Etching: image, 7 7/16 x 8 11/16; sheet, 9 9/16 x 12 5/8
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.825

The Picnic Grounds, 1906-7
Oil on canvas, 24 x 36
Purchase 41.34

Dolly with a Black Bow, 1907
Oil on canvas, 32 x 26
Gift of Miss Amelia Elizabeth White 59.28

The Hawk (Yolande in Large Hat), 1910
Oil on canvas, 26 x 32
Promised 50th Anniversary Gift of the John Sloan Memorial Foundation

Anshutz on Anatomy, 1912
Etching: image, 7 5/16 x 8 7/8; sheet, 11 3/8 x 16 11/16
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.835

Hanging Clothes, 1912
Etching: image, 2 5/8 x 3 5/8; sheet, 9 3/4 x 13 1/8
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.836

Kitchen and Bath, 1912
Oil on composition board, 24 x 20
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Albert Hackett 60.44

Swinging in the Square, 1912
Etching: image, 3 7/8 x 5 1/8; sheet, 9 1/4 x 12 1/2
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.838

Before Her Makers and Her Judge, 1913
Crayon on paper, 16 1/2 x 25
Purchase 36.38

Love on the Roof, 1914
Etching: image, 5 3/4 x 4 5/16; sheet, 12 3/4 x 9 9/16
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.846

Woman and Child on the Roof, 1914
Etching: image, 4 3/8 x 5 7/8; sheet, 9 3/8 x 12 1/2
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.847

Return from Toil, 1915
Etching: image, 4 1/8 x 5 11/16; sheet, 9 3/4 x 12 7/16
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.853

Juliana Force, 1916 and 1949
Oil on canvas, 32 x 26
Promised Gift of the John Sloan Memorial Foundation

Arch Conspirators, 1917
Etching: image, 4 3/16 x 5 13/16; sheet, 9 5/8 x 12 1/2
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.858

Hell Hole, 1917
Aquatint and etching: image, 7 7/8 x 9 3/4;
sheet, 10 x 12 5/8
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.859

Bandits' Cave, 1920
Etching: image, 6 7/8 x 4 7/8; sheet, 10 3/4 x 8 5/8
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.864

Bonfire, 1920
Etching: image, 5 1/16 x 7 1/4; sheet, 9 3/16 x 12 1/2
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.865

Boys Sledding, 1920
Etching: image, 5 1/8 x 6 7/8; sheet, 9 1/2 x 12 3/4
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.866

Romany Marie, 1920
Oil on canvas, 24 x 20
Purchase (and exchange) 51.40

Patrol Party, 1921
Etching: image, 2 5/16 x 3 5/8; sheet, 3 7/8 x 5 1/16
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.871

Shine, Washington Square, 1923
Etching: image, 4 15/16 x 6 13/16; sheet, 9 1/2 x 12 1/2
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.876

Sixth Avenue, Greenwich Village, 1923
Etching: image, 4 7/8 x 6 7/8; sheet, 9 5/8 x 12 3/4
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 36.154

Busses in Washington Square, 1925
Etching: image, 7 3/4 x 9 7/8; sheet, 12 3/16 x 16 15/16
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.880

Snowstorm in the Village, 1925
Etching: image, 6 7/8 x 5; sheet, 12 1/2 x 9 1/2
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.884

Easter Eve, 1926
Aquatint and etching: image, 9 15/16 x 7 7/8;
sheet, 17 3/8 x 12 3/8
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.885

The Lafayette, 1928
Etching: image, 5 1/4 x 6 15/16; sheet, 10 x 12 3/8
Gift of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.900

Sixth Avenue Elevated at Third Street, 1928
Oil on canvas, 30 x 40
Purchase 36.154

Romany Marye in Christopher Street, 1922, 1936
Etching: image, 6 x 8; sheet, 8 7/16 x 10 7/16
Gift of Helen Farr Sloan 80.14

Acknowledgments

"Spectators of Life: Guy Pène du Bois and John Sloan" was organized by the Downtown Branch of the Whitney Museum of American Art at Federal Hall National Memorial. The exhibition would not have been possible without the encouragement and cooperation of Federal Hall Associates and the National Park Service, Manhattan Sites.

The exhibition was organized by Karl Willers, Assistant Manager, Downtown Branch, and Rebecca Saunders, Helena Rubinstein Fellow in the Museum's Independent Study Program.

The Downtown Branch of the Whitney Museum is operated under the direction of Lisa Phillips, Head, Branch Museums, and Associate Curator, with Karl Willers, Assistant Branch Manager. The Downtown Branch is supported by the business community of Lower Manhattan.

Copyright 1983
Whitney Museum of American Art
945 Madison Ave.
New York, New York 10021

There would seem to be little connection between the working-class people portrayed by John Sloan (1871-1951) and the leisure-class characterizations of Guy Pène du Bois (1884-1958). But closer examination of the paintings, drawings, and prints of these two artists reveals similarities in artistic development and aesthetic principles, as well as a shared sense of wit and satire. Both Sloan and du Bois were strongly influenced by the realist philosophy of Robert Henri (1865-1929), Sloan's mentor and close friend and du Bois' inspiring teacher. Henri believed that art must interpret life and that the artist should represent that aspect of life with which he felt most comfortable. Hence, neither Sloan nor du Bois produced literal depictions of observed facts; realism, for them, implied a concern with art as a vehicle for commentary.

From the age of five until he was thirty-three, John Sloan lived in Philadelphia. Early in his life, he became interested in prints by the English satirists William Hogarth, Thomas Rowlandson, and George Cruikshank--images which ridiculed the aristocracy and poked fun at human foibles. Sloan later discovered the illustrations of John Leech in the British magazine Punch and the lithographs of the masterful French caricaturist Honoré Daumier.

In his teens, Sloan taught himself to etch and began making copies of Rembrandt etchings and of engraved reproductions of Rubens' paintings available to him through his job with a book-seller and print dealer. He moved on to a job designing novelties (calendars and the like) and subsequently went into illustrative design on a freelance basis. When this endeavor failed to provide sufficient income, Sloan took a position in the art department at the Philadelphia Inquirer in 1892. His work as a newspaper illustrator lasted for over a decade--three years at the Inquirer and eight with the Philadelphia Press. Sloan was quite successful as a newspaper illustrator, developing a decorative, art nouveau drawing style influenced by Japanese prints. At the age of twenty-four, he was recognized as one of the leading artists of the "Poster Period," a time during the mid-1890s when short-lived literary tabloids with poster-like covers appeared in abundance.

It was also in 1892 that Sloan met Robert Henri, who was to play a key role in his life. Henri and Sloan spent a great deal of time together and the closeness of their friendship is recorded in Sloan's 1906 etching Memory, which shows Robert and Linda Henri (on the left) spending a quiet, intimate evening with John and Dolly Sloan (on the right). Linda Henri had died the previous year--thus the title.

Sloan was one of the group of young Philadelphia newspaper artists--including E. Wyatt Davis (the father of Stuart Davis), William

Glackens, George Luks, Everett Shinn, James Preston, and George Fox--who were closely associated with the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Sloan entered a class at the academy taught by Thomas Anshutz, where the students sketched after casts of antique statues. (In the etching Anshutz on Anatomy of 1912, Sloan depicted Anshutz teaching a later class at the New York School of Art.) Several of the young artists at the Academy joined together under Henri to form the Charcoal Club, a group that met twice a week to study life drawing, which was not offered at the Academy. This radical secession from the Academy did not last long, and the club folded for financial reasons.

With the development of photomechanical processes of reproduction around the turn of the century, newspaper illustrators became obsolete. Sloan was laid off at the Philadelphia Press in 1903 and soon moved to New York. Here he committed himself to his creative work as an etcher and painter, doing freelance illustrations for books and magazines to support himself. Sloan's etchings began to reveal a marked preference for recording scenes of common, everyday life among the city's working class. This is first apparent in the group of ten etchings known as the "New York City Life" series (1905-06), which was later expanded to include three works of 1910-11. Each etching is a lively, humorous account of an ordinary, human encounter. Sloan's personal diary of these years is filled with descriptions of incidents he observed during his strolls about the streets of the city. His favorite areas were West Fourteenth Street and lower Sixth Avenue. Sloan produced such etchings as Man Monkey, Fun One Cent, and The Show Case (all of 1905) from memory, believing that this method allowed him to capture the essence of a scene rather than merely recount its visual facts.

Sloan was admittedly an "incorrigible window-watcher,"¹ and many of the sights he viewed from his back windows became subject matter for his art. He wrote in his diary:

I am in the habit of watching every bit of human life I can see about my windows, but I do it so I am not observed at it. I "peep" through real interest, not being observed myself. I feel that it is no insult to the people you are watching to do so unseen, that to do it openly and with great expression of amusement is an evidence of real vulgarity.²

Sloan "peeped" in order to capture the intimate, unaffected interior scenes found in the 1905 etchings The Women's Page, Turning Out the Light, and Man, Wife and Child. References to this innocent voyeurism within the work itself vary in degree of directness. Night Windows of 1910 implicates the viewer as a voyeur in collusion with the man in the etching who spies down upon a

woman at a dressing table from his rooftop perch. Other etchings, such as Roofs, Summer Night (1906), also place a member of the scene in a similar role. Yet in Sloan's art these views never become lurid; they remain charming, touching, and witty vignettes of private lives.

The subjects in the New York City Life series range from the intimate, and interior moments of Turning Out the Light to the fun-loving street scene in Man Monkey. But whatever the locale, Sloan's lower classes are always presented with respect and dignity. The same cannot be said for his depictions of the upper classes, for it was here that his sense of satire took hold. Guy Pène du Bois wrote that Sloan "will be satirical about Fifth Avenue and dangerously near to Romantic about Sixth. His Fifth Avenue people give you the feeling that they just moved over from Sixth and made themselves funnier than they were by the addition of more exaggerated clothes and manners."³ The satirical element to which du Bois refers is clearly evident in Fifth Avenue Critics (1905), which bitingly portrays "the fashionable ladies who used to drive up and down the Avenue about four o'clock of an afternoon, showing themselves and criticizing others."⁴

In 1908, Sloan became associated with the group of American realists known as The Eight after their joint exhibition at the Macbeth Galleries. About the same time, Sloan's involvement and sympathy with the working classes led him to accept the general principles of socialism. Both Sloan and Dolly joined the Socialist party in 1910 and began to devote much of their time to socialist and suffragist work. In 1912, Sloan became art editor of The Masses, a socialist journal newly reorganized under the direction of Max Eastman. The Masses offered Sloan the opportunity to depict "subjects of a human nature sort and good chances to make pictures. Just what is not true of most of the paid illustrations in the magazines."⁵ Sloan contributed fifty-three drawings, including covers, during his first four years with the publication. Before Her Makers and Her Judge (1913) was reproduced in The Masses to illustrate an article on prostitution. In this drawing, an attractive young woman accused of prostitution appears in a police court filled with men leering at her with a lasciviousness that suggests their desire to become her patrons. A simplified version of Return from Toil (1913) was used as a cover for the July 1913 issue. In such illustrations Sloan consciously rejected the usual approach of socialist cartoons, which so frequently represented the working classes as helpless victims. The majority of Sloan's graphic work of this period was fundamentally affirmative: the people who inhabit his images show a strength and integrity capable of initiating social change. With the outbreak of World War I in 1914, Sloan, an ardent pacifist, became discouraged with the ineffectual policy of the Socialist party; he resigned from The Masses in 1916, and left the party a few years later.

Sloan's social and political concerns are

often evident in his work, however the technical and formal aspects of his paintings cannot be ignored. The Picnic Grounds (1906-07) and Kitchen and Bath (1912) are two paintings that represent the common, everyday events found in many of Sloan's etchings. In both paintings, the artist captured the scene and its ambiance quickly and easily through a direct painting technique learned from Henri. These works also reveal Henri's influence over Sloan's early use of color. In reaction against the "pretty" colors of Impressionism, Henri encouraged the adoption of a dark, muted palette of browns relieved by highlights of white. Dolly with Black Bow (1909), with its loose brushstrokes and rather summary treatment of certain areas, seems to have been executed rapidly. However, Sloan spent a great deal of time on his portraits, painstakingly trying to achieve a favorable likeness while working directly before the sitter.

In 1909, Henri introduced Sloan to a new color system developed by Hardesty Marratta, an artist, chemist, and paint manufacturer. Marratta had invented a system of selling paints mixed to set color intervals. As is evident in The Hawk (Yolanda in Large Hat) of 1910, Sloan's color became more lively and adventurous using the Marratta paints. Sloan's palette continued to broaden and lighten throughout the teens, possibly influenced by the brilliant color of the modernist works he saw at the Armory Show of 1913.

As for subject matter, Sloan's portrayals of city life during the late teens and twenties focus less on particular people or events and more on the city as a spectacle. This is apparent in such etchings as Hell Hole (1917), Sixth Avenue, Greenwich Village (1923), and Bonfire (1920), in which individuals become part of a crowd, contributing to the overall atmosphere of the scene. In Sixth Avenue Elevated at Third Street of 1928, a mood charged with drama is captured largely through the portrayal of natural and artificial sources of light as well as human and mechanical sources of movement. This painting signals a change in Sloan's technique. The slashing brushstrokes of earlier works have given way to a more finished style, achieved through painting glaze upon glaze during numerous sessions with the canvas. Many of Sloan's prints of the twenties, such as Snowstorm in the Village (1923) and Easter Eve (1926), show his growing interest in the depiction of specific conditions of weather, light, and times of day.

With the encouragement of his father, a man of letters and art critic for the New York American, Guy Pène du Bois enrolled at the New York School of Art in 1899. He was only fifteen. His instructors included such notables as Carol Beckwith, Frank Vincent du Mond and

Kenneth Hayes Miller, as well as William Merritt Chase, founder of the School, who taught his students a quick and fluid painting technique. But it was Robert Henri's arrival in 1902 that had the greatest influence on du Bois. Henri's radical art-for-life's-sake philosophy inspired the young student's imagination. "Henri set the class in an uproar. Completely overturned the apple cart: displaced art by life, discarded technique, broke the prevailing gods as easily as brittle porcelain. The talk was uncompromising, the approach unsubtle, the result pandemonium."⁶ Like Sloan, du Bois adopted Henri's muted palette and practice of painting directly on the canvas without making tedious preliminary drawings. Although du Bois was a prodigious sketcher throughout his life, his drawings are not studies for his paintings as much as they are variations on a similar theme.

In 1905, armed with Henri's challenge to use art to interpret life, du Bois accompanied his father on a business trip to Europe. After several weeks in London, they continued to Paris, where he was left to discover the city on his own. The life in the cafés and public places where the fashionable gathered began to appear in du Bois' drawings. He also became friends with Demetrius Galanis, a printmaker who illustrated for the socialist paper l'Asiette au Beurre. Galanis' illustrations, which "could attack the callousness of the rich with real malice,"⁷ made an impression on the young American. Often persuaded against his will to accompany Galanis to the Concert Rouge, du Bois would sit and sketch in the concert hall. This leisurely life abroad ended abruptly in 1906 when his father became seriously ill and died on the return voyage.

Back in New York, du Bois needed work and, on the basis of his father's reputation, was hired as a general reporter for the New York American. At the trials and police courts he covered for the paper, he found subjects that would appear in his art, often years later, as in The Law of 1915. Like Sloan, du Bois often reserved his most biting and sardonic characterizations for those in positions of power and authority.

Not well suited to the tasks of a general reporter, du Bois was assigned to review performances at the Metropolitan Opera, although he knew little about music. "It is a pity," he wrote, "and a major misfortune when a painter becomes a music critic. Or so I should feel if I had not found a subject matter which was very much to my liking at the opera house."⁸ He began producing small paintings and drawings of men and women in gala evening attire. In Opera (1907), a particularly early example, the two men depicted on the right are portraits of the opera critics from the New York Sun and the New York Tribune who frequently gave advice to du Bois. In his autobiography, du Bois explained why such subjects appealed to him more than the life of the common man:

I aspired then, in extreme youth, to be a man of the world....The bland American face was boring. The careless American's affected or natural preference for fatigue dress seemed to me to carry unconsciousness too far, to be a move away from rather than toward civilization. I sought signs or symbols of sophistication. The men in full dress at the opera house, though often uncomfortably constricted in these clothes, were at least attempting to reach the goal of my desire. Those I most admired in the limited choice of that day had the red faces of bons viveurs. They were frankly materialistic and could allow a glint to appear in their eyes or even leer, if you like, in the presence of a succulent pudding or a beautiful woman. I never discovered which they preferred. At least, they were not puritans.⁹

Du Bois' early works were small since his growing responsibilities as a music and, later, art critic left him little time for large canvases. These works, he noted, were painted "in the parlor and from memory. Rarely larger than twelve by sixteen inches, they were usually completed in from one to three hours. Memorial of an incident seen not more than a day before...."¹⁰

Du Bois acquired a reputation as a biting satirist early in his career. He was obviously somewhat fascinated by glamour and wealth, but in his best works, such as Mother and Daughter (1928) and Father and Son (1929), the style and sophistication of the elegant figures is often compromised by a sense of callous pomposity and unflattering self-indulgence. Conscious of this aspect of his work, du Bois remarked:

...in [my] satire there is something akin to bite. But it is not from bitterness. There can be love of the humanness in fault. People are all right. They are ludicrous only in the badges they wear, badges that are tokens of devotion to one ideal or another. Badges or marks left by chains of their slavery. Funny slaves proud of their chains, strutting in them, and nice in the ingenious generosity of all naiveté. It cannot be from hatred that they are satirized.¹¹

Around 1915, du Bois' painting underwent a dramatic change in style. Passages of brilliant, saturated color began to appear, replacing the heavily impastoed brushstrokes and subdued colors characteristic of his earlier works. Although the size of his canvases remained modest, his compositions became simpler, often consisting of only one or two figures

against a solid ground, as in Blonde and Brunette (1916). These stylistic changes could have been prompted by his first exposure to the works of the Fauves and Nabis in the Armory Show of 1913. As a member of the publicity committee for the exhibition and newly appointed editor of Arts and Decoration, du Bois devoted the entire March 1913 issue of the magazine to the show. During his early career as an art critic, he was sympathetic to modernism, encouraging a pluralism of modernist and realist styles. However, during the late twenties and thirties, he became more and more critical of modernist painting as it increasingly eclipsed the realist style in which he himself worked.

Du Bois had his first one-man exhibition at the Whitney Studio Club, forerunner of the Whitney Museum, in 1918. The Club, founded by Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney as a place where artists could meet and socialize, was itself an outgrowth of an exhibition space (called simply the Whitney Studio) where John Sloan had had his first one-man show in 1916. Du Bois was a close friend of Mrs. Whitney, who often provided him with financial assistance and the use of a studio in MacDougal Alley. His association with the Whitney Studio Club is recorded in a portrait of its director, Juliana Force. Juliana Force at the Whitney Studio Club (c. 1920) depicts Mrs. Force surveying the Club's galleries in a dazzling evening gown. It makes a striking contrast to John Sloan's portrait of a more casually dressed Juliana Force, painted in 1916 and reworked slightly in the late forties.

By the early twenties, du Bois found himself spending too much time as a critic and too little as a painter. He began summering in Westport, Connecticut. But the community there, as he described it, "excelled the riotousness of New York. There gin and orange juice ruled the days and nights. Talk was an extravaganza. Work was an effort made between parties."¹² Surrounded by the distractions of the glamorous literary and artistic world in and around New York, du Bois could not discipline himself to paint. In 1924, he sailed for France, expecting to stay only a year. But he remained for six, settling in the small village of Garges outside of Paris. In a large barn he converted into a studio, du Bois was able, for the first time in his life, to devote long, uninterrupted days to his painting. "It was in Garges that I learned to paint, that I sometimes managed to dig deeper than the surface and that I also sometimes managed to lend some beauty to the surface of pigment."¹³ Excursions to Paris were frequent. While visiting with other American artists living there, he studied the composed elegance of Parisian café society, producing such works as Morning, Paris Café (1926) and Café Monnot (1929).

The works du Bois created in France during the twenties are among the most ambitious and successful of his career. Many of his canvases expanded in size. His palette lightened, the color becoming even more vibrant, adventurous,

and resonant. In Opera Box (1926) and Woman with a Cigarette (1929), the hallmarks of his mature style can be seen. The figures, isolated against an empty ground, have acquired an almost sculptural solidity. Du Bois described himself as "working on a figure until its form becomes as solid and almost as static as wood. A fellow making a palpable thing, if possible, more palpable than it is, making it into a sort of post or pillar to hang on to in an evanescent world."¹⁴ The figures' sculptural volume enhances their appearance of suave urbanity tinged with an attitude of unapproachable haughtiness. In these stylized figures, du Bois captured the glitter, sophistication, and decadence of the Roaring Twenties.

K.W. and R.S.

Footnotes

1. Quoted in Van Wyck Brooks, John Sloan: A Painter's Life. (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1955), p. 61.
2. John Sloan's New York Scene, ed. Bruce St. John (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1965), p. 549.
3. Guy Pène du Bois, John Sloan, exhibition catalogue (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1931), pp. 10-11.
4. Quoted in John Sloan Painting & Prints: Seventy-fifth Anniversary Retrospective with His Introduction and Commentary (Hanover, N.H.: Carpenter Galleries, Department of Art and Archaeology, Dartmouth College, 1946), unpaginated, cat. no. 35.
5. Quoted in Brooks, John Sloan, p. 97.
6. Guy Pène du Bois, Artists Say the Silliest Things (New York: American Artists Group, 1940), p. 86.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 116.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 128.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 132-33.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 129.
11. Guy Pène du Bois, "Guy Pene du Bois on Guy Pene du Bois," International Studio, 75(June 1922), p. 243.
12. Du Bois, Artists Say the Silliest Things, p. 124.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 249.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 199.

Spectators of Life

Guy Pène du Bois and John Sloan

Selections from the Permanent Collection



John Sloan, Night Windows, 1910.

**Whitney Museum of American Art
Downtown Branch**

at Federal Hall National Memorial
26 Wall Street (at Broad)

September 19 - October 28, 1983